The men of the East may spell the stars, 
And times and triumphs mark, 
But the men signed of the cross of Christ 
Go gaily in the dark.

Night shall be thrice night over you, 
And heaven an iron cope. 
Do you have joy without a cause, 
Yea, faith without a hope? 
G.K. Chesterton, The Ballad of the White Horse

Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the work of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. (Isaiah 50:10)

There is a problem in the life of holiness that for many does not arise at all, for some emerges intermittently, but for a certain number—more, I suspect, than ever acknowledge it in any public way—is virtually lifelong. It is the problem of felt abandonment by God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, within the frame of full commitment to God: in other words, the desolation and seeming desertion of the deeply devoted. The case of Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta in 1950 and their leader till her death in 1997 at the age of 87, has recently highlighted this perplexing reality, and the easiest way to present the problem is to review her story.

Darkness: the Personal Distress

Born Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Yugoslavia (now part of the Republic of Macedonia), she loved Jesus and wanted to be a missionary from a very early age. At 18 she left for Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto, an education-oriented community whose work in India she hoped to share. She went to Calcutta as a Loreto Sister the following year, 1929. She became a nun, Sister Mary Teresa (later, as head of a missionary order, Mother Mary Teresa) in 1931. She took the name Teresa from St. Therese of Lisieux. In 1946, so she reported, Jesus Christ her Lord called her into slum work. “Come be my light” to the sick, the dying, beggars and street children, was what she was sure he was saying to her. She was given permission to start, and did so alone, though others joined her before long. She became a household word in the West through Malcolm Muggeridge’s film and book about her, both titled, in a phrase that she herself
I

n the previous issue of Knowing & Doing, I noted, “Much of what is called Christianity in America is nominal. And even worse, much of what is authentic is quite shallow.” A quick look at some recent research helps to clarify the picture. The National Study of Youth and Religion found that the religious view of many teenagers consists of this set of beliefs: “1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life, except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.” This set of beliefs has been dubbed “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” and kids develop much of it from the values and behavior of their parents.

What are some of the values and beliefs of American adults that give rise to such thinking among kids? The January 2009 issue of The Barna Update reports that the rampant individualism in American culture has led to many people simply “picking and choosing” what they like in the Bible and discarding the rest. Further, millions of people hold religious beliefs that are contradictory. For example, while saying they believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches, they also believe that Jesus Christ sinned and that “a person can do enough good works to earn salvation.” Both views clearly contradict what the Bible teaches. And this is not surprising, given that the ways in which beliefs are developed today are also changing. People spend less time reading the Bible and listening to sermons and teaching, and rely more on emotions, “dialog, self-reflection, and observation.”

Much more could be said, but this snapshot highlights a couple of indicators of the spiritually challenging times in which we are living. Clearly, those who love Jesus Christ and want to see him glorified and his church flourishing cannot continue with business as usual. In the next issue of Knowing & Doing, we will look at some of the time-honored steps we can take to move in that direction.
Living a life of contentment depends in part upon one’s expectations, and there’s a disturbing trend among Christians to embrace expectations that are anything but biblical. Set foot in a Christian bookstore, and you’ll see lots of titles about living a life of total enjoyment, staying young, and keeping healthy. One might even believe that with the proper advice from the right guru, you could lead a life free from trouble. But the Bible says nothing of an idyllic or carefree life this side of heaven. In fact, Jesus couldn’t be any clearer in John 16:33 when he tells the disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (NIV). Yet we are masters at ignoring this simple truth. We continue to chase that rainbow of a life that was never intended for this world, and we’re keenly disappointed when we run into heartache instead of a pot of gold. And wasn’t this precisely the game plan of the demons in The Screwtape Letters? Screwtape explained to Wormwood, “We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow’s end.”

I ran into heartache several years ago. Before 1999, I had never really experienced true sorrow. I was happily married, and I enjoyed the added blessing of my husband, Will, a physician, blending into my family to an unusual degree. During our years of dating, my brother, Craig, and Will became the very best of friends. They loved spending time together, and kept each other laughing for hours on end. My dad and Will also shared an uncommon fondness and admiration for each other.

Since God had blessed them both with incredible intellect, they enjoyed each other’s insights, and they spent whole afternoons in deep conversation. Sometimes I even felt as though Will was more a part of my family than I was. We had many wonderful times together, and I cherish all those memories.

But that season of life changed abruptly in the fall of 1999. One Saturday afternoon in November my parents boarded a plane in Florida to come see Will and me in Washington, D.C. Because they were using pass privileges from my sister’s job with Northwest, they were making a connection in Detroit, which is where I grew up. About five minutes before I needed to leave for the airport, the phone rang.

My brother Craig had the unbearable job of telling me that our beloved father had had a heart attack on the airplane, and that he had died before they landed in Detroit. I remember hanging up the receiver, and just screaming and screaming and screaming. Will was on call at the hospital and we had just moved into the neighborhood the week before. Someone called the police in response to all the screaming and it was a surreal experience when they showed up at my door.

When I paged Will, he rushed home from the hospital and did his best to console me. He held me and read Scripture to me, but after many hours had passed, I still could not sleep. I went and sat on the bed where my parents were supposed to be. I was overwhelmed by how quickly my life had changed. And the only thing I could pray was, “God help her,” because I didn’t know how my mom could possibly survive the loss. In fact, I was worried from that very first night that it would be like losing both of my parents.
A number of years ago in Europe, I was talking with a British friend of mine about all the changes we were witnessing in the various cultures we had visited. Change was the order of the day as old views, beliefs, and values were discarded and new ones ushered in with unfettered enthusiasm. As with many seasons in life, we saw opposing schools. Some embraced all change as essentially good, to be welcomed without hesitation. Others saw change as a threat and were anxious about what was being lost and the implications of those losses.

My friend coined the phrase “cultural vaporization,” which drew on the analogy of boiling water. Water, while remaining water, disappears into the air at a designated temperature. The phrase “cultural vaporization” actually reflects a statement used by Karl Marx when he spoke of a set of conditions “where all that is solid melts into air.” It is a descriptive phrase, and when applied to various contexts, provides helpful insight.

One area where I have noticed a definite shift, or “vaporization,” is in evangelism. Here I am not talking about the programmatic emphasis of special days, so-called “missions,” or guest speakers at church. I mean the heartfelt, Spirit-led, and biblically shaped personal desire to share with others, as often as possible, the good news of the gospel.

Writing to Timothy, the Apostle Paul reminded him, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline” (1 Tim. 1:7, NIV). He followed with the clear exhortation: “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord” (1 Tim. 1:8). When I first became a Christian in Scotland over 30 years ago, the climate was one of biblical faithfulness, a serious life and lifestyle, and a strong commitment to the proclamation and advance of the gospel. I was encouraged to give my “testimony” to others. We gave out tracts, visited homes, and shared scripture when we could. Were there mistakes? Of course. Was some of it culturally insensitive and at times possibly a bit rude? Yes. But it was not all bad, nor was it all flawed or ineffective.

Let me back up a bit now to where I began, that is, with the notion of change or cultural vaporization. The experience of modernity and the growth of technological, political, economic, and social developments have all had a massive impact upon society and culture. We have experienced what Philip Rieff calls “the triumph of the therapeutic.” Other social commentators such as David Brooks speak about living “On Paradise Drive” and how consumerism frames and defines so much of what we do or want. It is an age where looking good and feeling good are the major goals in life, and where being good and doing good are notions that carry less weight, concern, or power.

What does this have to do with evangelism? Clearly, for many, the very idea of
publicly sharing their faith with a stranger or of getting into a reasoned disagreement about God, Christ, the Bible, or truth is one of the worst things they could contemplate. Despite the fact that they are daily the target of constant communication trying to sell some product or another, or of someone’s views and values being trumpeted as the latest solution for our problems, many Christians opt for silence, for the “stealth” approach. Perhaps, they imagine, if we just live quiet, consistent, good lives, our example will do all that is needed and onlookers can “choose” if they want to. However, Paul would say otherwise: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

The issue I want to highlight is how our current cultural realities undermine many of our core convictions, dampen our biblical enthusiasm, and lead us to redefine our behavior and commitments. What do I mean? We may still pay lip service to certain beliefs or to particular values (Bible study, prayer, evangelism, etc.), but in practice we often give them little or no thought. We relax in the knowledge that these things are covered by the professionals whose job it is to do them. We still believe in them, we just don’t feel any urgency or need to personally engage in them.

At this point, I’d like to add another dimension, what I’d like to call the parable of the nice Muslim. I recently took a taxi from Oxford to Heathrow airport. The driver was a Muslim gentleman from Pakistan. I had barely entered the taxi when he enquired as to whether I believed in God. He then launched into a polite but lengthy effort to persuade me of my need to embrace Islam and the one true path.

He was not aggressive, nor was he rude, but he was sincere and determined. I asked questions in order to see how much he understood of the Christian faith he so clearly rejected. I challenged some of his statements. I saw quickly that the only “authority” he knew or acknowledged was the Qur’an. Despite this we had an amiable exchange and actually agreed on several points. His observations about the state of British culture, the problems with immorality, and the sad state of many youngsters were all quite relevant. However, our disagreements were profound, and as Os Guinness would say, “The differences made a difference.”

He did not acknowledge the Bible, did not believe Jesus was the son of God, and did not believe any other wisdom or insight was needed other than that found in the Qur’an and the teachings of Islam. Our disagreements did not end the interaction, they merely sharpened it. In fact, as I stepped out of the taxi at the airport, he held my hand and wished me a good life and many blessings.

I could not help but reflect on this encounter. First of all, in today’s politically correct and somewhat paranoid era, it is hard to imagine many Christians being willing to face this kind of scenario. Either we would freeze up at the first exchange, or make some polite comment which could dismiss the whole thing. Secondly, for many of us the very idea that we might initiate such a dialogue is enough to send our heart palpitations into overdrive. I wondered:

• Would I have had the courage or conviction to launch into a serious witnessing attempt with a complete stranger?
• What kind of boldness, courage, or conviction is needed to prompt this direct approach?
• Were the possible risks (offense or other) unknown or were they of little weight?

I thought of the many discussions I have had on what it means to “do church” in this era, and quite frankly they seemed trivial and irrelevant in light of the larger issues at stake in our time. The huge fascination with relevance and authenticity (both valid issues) at times eclipses bigger losses and challenges that we seem less concerned about. It seems to me that a sincere effort to adapt to modern conditions and to seek ever-newer ways to be “relevant” has come with a hidden price tag. Historic beliefs and practices have come (continued on page 24)
Is Jesus Really the Only Way to God?

by Dennis P. Hollinger, Ph.D.
President and Professor of Christian Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Last year the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published a major study on religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices in the United States. One of the significant findings was that 70 percent of all Americans believe that many religions can lead to eternal life, including 65 percent of all self-identifying Christians. Perhaps the most surprising finding of the study was that 56 percent of all evangelical Christians believe that there are many paths, other than faith in Christ, to God and eternal life. (See http://pewforum.org.)

Many were so shocked by these numbers that the Pew Forum went back and did further polling to make sure that by the word “religion” respondents did not have in mind other Christian bodies or denominations. Their earlier results were essentially confirmed.

In this most recent study, large numbers of Americans believe that actions or a combination of beliefs and actions can lead people to God. Even among the 30 percent of Americans who say that eternal life depends on one’s belief, nearly half designate belief in God, a higher power, or other generic beliefs as sufficient for salvation. Among evangelical Christians, only 45 percent clearly affirm that a personal belief in or relationship with Christ is essential for eternal life.

Increasing numbers of Americans, Christians, and even evangelicals are questioning the long-held commitment of the Church that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ.

Among all Americans who are affiliated with a religion, 52 percent believe that Islam leads to eternal life with God, 53 percent believe that Hinduism leads to God, and 42 percent even believe that atheism leads to God. Among evangelicals, the numbers are 35 percent, 33 percent, and 26 percent, respectively. Clearly in recent years in the midst of growing cultural and religious pluralism large numbers of Christians are troubled by or ignore the claim of Jesus, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

What are we to make of all this? Is Jesus really the only way to God? In a pluralistic world, why shouldn’t we accept an inclusivity that embraces multiple ways to salvation? Isn’t it arrogant to believe otherwise?

Our Pluralistic Context

The perspective that there are many ways to God is essentially one variant of universalism, the belief that ultimately all humans will be embraced by God and experience eternal life. To be sure it is an old belief that was occasionally found early on in Christianity. In the third century the theologian Origen contended that in the end God would restore the whole of creation, including Satan, to a perfect state. This meant that people who never trusted Christ would be saved. Origen’s beliefs were condemned by a Church council in the fifth century.

Over the years and in our own time there have been many arguments for a

In a pluralistic world, why shouldn’t we accept an inclusivity that embraces multiple ways to salvation? Isn’t it arrogant to believe otherwise?

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universalism or at least a religious pluralism that questions the uniqueness of Christ for salvation. Some argue that it is arrogant and triumphalistic to believe that any one way is essential for salvation. Others contend that surely God is a God of love and mercy who will accept people into his presence who don’t believe in Christ. The mercy of God triumphs all other characteristics of God.

Some contend that all religions are essentially the same, simply using different names for the divine and different emphases in following the divine path. Still others attempt to articulate a religious pluralism or universalism on biblical grounds, citing texts such as Colossians 1:18-19, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross,” or Romans 11:32, “For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

But perhaps the most significant factor for the growing belief in many paths to God is the pluralism of our social context. By pluralism I don’t mean merely the existence of multiple nationalities, races, ethnic groups, or religions in a society. More fundamentally, pluralism means that varying worldviews, belief systems, and moral frameworks exist side by side in a given culture.

With pluralism we now rub shoulders daily with people who put their world together in vastly different ways. There are varying perceptions of God, the good life, salvation, and human nature. There are varying ways of life reflecting these worldview assumptions. As we daily live with a plethora of worldviews, we experience these folks to be exceptionally fine people, who often reflect integrity, high morals, and outstanding contributions to our communities. For a democracy to work, we recognize that these multiple frameworks all need to have a voice in the public square, and all religious and moral frameworks need to be assured of essential rights under the law.

In the milieu of social and legal pluralism, it is quite easy to glide into a religious pluralism that questions the uniqueness or truth claims of Christian faith. When we experience people of other religions as good, moral people it becomes increasingly difficult to entertain any notions other than multiple paths to God and salvation. When we encounter the plurality of the public square, it becomes almost second nature to believe that such plurality must exist with regard to truth and paths to eternal life. Moreover, when we look around us, many who are exclusive in their beliefs often appear to be arrogant and intolerant. Religious pluralists appear to be kind, accepting, and exhibiting a tolerance needed for a pluralistic world.

The reality of this sociocultural pluralism makes it difficult to maintain a belief in and commitment to Christ as the only way to God. Our context of multiplicity tends to undermine the long-held belief that salvation is found only in Jesus.

How Do We Respond?

Given the contexts of our time, what do we do with the question, “Is Jesus really the only way to God?”

As we respond to this question we need first of all to note that Jesus thought himself to be unique and the only way to a personal relationship with God. In Jesus’ teachings he made very direct claims about himself and his work that clearly reveal his own identity:

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son…. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Mt. 11:27-28).

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this; to believe in the one he has sent” (Jn. 6:29).
A Vacation with Kingdom Purpose
Worldview Training in England or Ireland—or Both!

by Thomas S. Heard, Ph.D.
Teaching Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

As the Western World continues to dissolve into a patchwork of religious pluralism and moral relativism, believers are being exposed to and challenged by many different worldviews. The postmodern influence of moral and cultural relativism with its rejection of objective truth is widespread in western culture, even in parts of the Church. The New Age movement (eastern pantheism in a western dress) is flourishing in many guises in the West. And even atheism has found a new voice, zealously presenting its tired and empty reasons for the dismissal of God with a militant and angry spirit, letting emotion drive its arguments. Truth, simply put, is under fire today as never before. In this clash of worldviews, there is an urgent need for believers to become credible witnesses of Jesus Christ and to learn how to give coherent and winsome answers to those who are open to hearing reasons for their faith.

For those who want some solid training addressing worldviews, there are two opportunities coming up this summer. The first is with the Zacharias Trust, the European Office of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), which offers an intensive, week-long summer school to train believers in understanding and engaging with the increasingly secular world. Each year around the first week of July, a group of about a hundred people arrive in Oxford, England, to learn from some of the brightest and most winsome apologists and evangelists in ministry today. Some have attended previously, but come again to be updated, refreshed, and reunited with friends. Most, however, are first-time attendees, arriving with great expectations, and returning home well trained and with new friends, eager to put their learning into God’s service. Whether new or alumni, all are better prepared to meet the challenge of 1 Peter 3:15.

The summer school begins mid-afternoon on Sunday as the conferees arrive at Queen’s College and are each greeted by the friendly RZIM staff, served tea and coffee, and given a course notebook and conference badge. Michael Ramsden, one of the main speakers and apologists at the summer school, provides a warm welcome to the conferees. At 5:00 everyone gathers in the main lecture hall for a quick orientation of the week’s offerings, and then all head to the college dining hall for dinner. The breaking of bread in the historic dining hall gives opportunity for conferees to meet each other and develop relationships.
and is as enjoyable and memorable as the time spent together in the lectures.

A quick glance at the week’s schedule shows that the days are very full, starting with community breakfast at 7:30 a.m., and including an average of five lectures, the last ending around 9:15 p.m. Afterwards, some students head out to the Lamb and the Flag or the Eagle and the Child, local pub haunts of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, where they can relax and discuss the day’s talks and how they apply to life and ministry. The days are long, but they are so rich in teaching and fellowship that the time seems to go by too quickly.

In addition to good teaching and fellowship, there is an Oxford tour, a river cruise, and a final banquet dinner, which make for great social events during the week. Free time after lunch also allows one to visit the city on foot, including the venerable Blackwell’s bookstore. Oxford is filled with history, and even casual walks around this university town provide you the opportunity to see places where Cranmer, Wesley, Lewis, and Tolkien made their marks for Christ. Addison’s Walk is also worth the time to experience, as this was the footpath Lewis took with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson that began the good work in him. Bring a comfortable pair of walking shoes to explore the town that is home to the oldest English-speaking university in the world. The university comprises 38 separate colleges, each with its own campus, so there is a lot to see and think about as you walk through the center city, where a college and its chapel are found on almost every street.

Summer school runs in 2009 from June 29 to July 3, with a theme this year of “War of Worldviews.” Worldview is a red-hot topic for believers today, and every opportunity should be made to become familiar with worldviews, what they are, and how we can address the worldviews of anyone from atheists to pantheists. Instructors scheduled to teach in 2009 include Ravi Zacharias, Michael Ramsden, Arun Andrews, John Lennox, Tom Tarrants, Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing, and Michael Green. Each morning Arun Andrews will teach the first section on the Beatitudes, and John Lennox will spend the mid-morning sessions addressing the topic of the New Atheists. Other lectures will follow in the afternoon and evening, with a total of 38 lectures presented. While the afternoon sessions will offer a choice of different topics simultaneously, all sessions are recorded and will be made available free of charge a few months after the summer school.

As believers face real and sometimes harsh challenges in defending our faith, it is important for us to take heed of what Peter meant in 1 Peter 3:15 when he said to “be prepared.” He meant to study and put the time in to give an answer to those who ask about the reason for the hope in Christ that is winsome, cogent, and squares with the life you live. The RZIM Summer School will prepare you to meet that challenge in the historic city that also prepared C.S. Lewis and other great saints like him. For more information visit www.rzim.org.

If Oxford does not suit your schedule or budget, another good option is in Ireland. In 2005, I met the Rev. John Kirkpatrick, with whom I formed an instant friendship. John is pastor of Portrush Presbyterian Church, where he and his family serve this mile-long peninsula community in the beautiful coastal region of Northern Ireland. John is also the chairman for the New Horizon conference that takes place about a week after the Oxford RZIM Summer School. New Horizon started on the Coleraine Campus of the University of Ulster in 1989, and its roots lie in the 1954 Billy Graham Harringay Crusade. New Horizon is a week-long,
Urban Plunge

by Sarah Bruce
C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow

On November 1, 2008, forty C.S. Lewis Fellows and staff participated in an “Urban Plunge” in Washington, D.C. Our hosts, through Christian Student Missions, designed a day of urban immersion to help participants better understand poverty and homelessness. For the Fellows, it was an extension of a monthly study on “Loving God and Neighbor” and an opportunity to broaden their definition of neighbor to include “the least of these.” For me, as the organizer, it was an opportunity to combine my latent passion for inner-city ministry with my love of the Fellows program—my own chance to link knowing with doing.

My first “Urban Plunge” experience occurred in 2007 as a Fellow. We spent our morning in manual labor and our afternoon engaged in conversations with homeless people in D.C. parks. It was here that God reminded me how to see people as He sees them, to put names to nameless faces, and to love them as He does. I spent time with Joe and James. My team interacted with Irene and Mike and Juan and Pete. We did not have food or money to offer them. Our gift to them was time and a chance for them to tell their stories. Their gift to us was the opportunity to hear about their lives and to interact with those who are dear to the heart of God.

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“Loving God and Neighbor” and an opportunity to broaden their definition of neighbor to include “the least of these.” For me, as the organizer, it was an opportunity to combine my latent passion for inner-city ministry with my love of the Fellows program—my own chance to link knowing with doing.

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This second plunge began much like my first one. We spent the morning preparing meals, cleaning, and doing yard work at various ministry sites around the city. At lunch, Larry, a formerly homeless man who met Jesus through a feeding program, shared his vision for our work that day. He was so thankful that we had come. He said so over and over. He wanted us to realize that Christians had begun a chain of kindness in the city long ago. Our job was to continue adding to that chain, one link at a time.

In the afternoon, we were sent out in small groups to meet homeless men and women. Not surprisingly, our group was nervous. Most of us felt ill equipped, uninformed, and unsure of what would happen next. We were being sent to seek out and engage with the very people that most of us are conditioned to avoid. Fearing for our safety or overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue, we disengage. But disengagement was not an option this time. It was our job to figure out public transportation and find people to talk with. I joked that I would be patrolling all area Starbucks to ensure accountability. Lattes could wait. There were people whom the Lord had arranged for us to meet. Larry’s words to us rang true. “You won’t be able to do everything you want to do today, but you can do something. Leave the rest to Jesus.”

My group of six got off the bus and broke into pairs. We smiled when we discovered that two of the women in the group worked nearby. They were familiar with the park and were already thinking ahead. Could they come back, perhaps

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meeting over lunch, and develop a more ongoing interaction with the people there? What we thought was a random assignment was clearly God’s design. We prayed for the Spirit to go before us, and to speak through us.

When the day was done and the feedback was gathered, the individual stories were bountiful. The impact on the Fellows was significant. Some felt a clear call of the Lord to continue taking personal “plunges” on their own. One group organized a coat drive, and returned within the month to distribute them. Another pair made a connection between a Nigerian pastor they knew and a lonely, discouraged woman on a park bench. She was not homeless but was struggling with why God had brought her from Nigeria to this new country only to face so much hardship. Through this new relationship, she has found the beginnings of community and secured a better place to live—a divine appointment and another link in Larry’s chain.

Another Fellow experienced a more private epiphany. She shared that she had always been terribly afraid of the homeless. She feared for her safety and that of her children and went to great lengths to avoid them. The Lord had changed her mind over the course of a few hours. She now saw them as people. Throughout the group, the Lord was opening eyes, altering thinking, and transforming lives. I realize that most of us have not been called to full-time urban ministry. We don’t pretend to know how to fix the problems in the city. Their complexity is mind-numbing. We have more questions than answers. Depending on our life stage, we may not even have time to offer. And what about money? It’s easy to toss a few coins in a cup, but what if our funds fuel an addiction and make the circumstances worse? In this context, what is the real value of the Urban Plunge? Should we continue to take our busy Fellows to D.C. for the day? Some initial answers came to me the Monday after the plunge. It was a culmination of all of the reading, thinking, planning, and discussing that I have done on the subject. Let me share the story with you.

After rich experiences, I need quiet processing, but on that Monday I also needed to make a grocery list, do my Bible study for Thursday’s meeting, and prepare for a parenting class that I was teaching. Perhaps I could accomplish at least a few of these tasks at my favorite Monday morning “office”—a coffee shop. The twenty or so miles west on Route 7 where I now sat seemed quite a distance from my D.C. experience of two days earlier—until I met Jerry.

He was sleeping in one of the comfy upholstered chairs in Starbucks. Initially nameless, he did not have the telltale pile of belongings with him, but I guessed that he was probably homeless from his dirty, layered clothes, his scruffy beard, his winter hat, and his weathered hands folded across his lap.

I took a seat at an open table on the other side of the shop and spent the next half hour looking up Scripture verses about Jesus’ humanity. Like any well-trained mom, I was multi-tasking—studying while monitoring the man in the chair. The author of Hebrews was emphasizing the idea that Jesus was one of us, that he took on human flesh to be “one of the brethren” so that He could identify with us and defeat sin and death on our behalf. Meanwhile, the man in the comfy chair had gotten up and gone outside, out of sight. I felt a prompting to talk to him but pushed the thought aside. I don’t like to initiate conversations with strangers. What would I say anyway? I needed to get my work done.

Another series of thoughts consumed the last one: “What about the Plunge? Was that just a field trip for you? What did you advise the Fellows when they asked you the same question? How could you lead that two days ago and ignore this man today? Haven’t you learned anything?” The Spirit was relentless.

I stood up. He was back, just outside the door at one of the small round tables. I walked out too and approached him.

“I saw you in Starbucks” (continued on page 28)
Mother Teresa: Holiness in the Dark
(continued from page 1)

originated, Something Beautiful for God (1969, 1971), and in 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize. Fast-tracked upon her death for official Catholic sainthood, she was beatified by Pope John Paul II (that is, given the title Blessed) in 2003. This was half-way to canonization as a saint. Brian Kolodiejchuk, a senior Missionaries of Charity member, was made her postulator, charged to petition for her full sainthood and to collect supportive material. As part of this process he edited and published, Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

The contents of this book are mainly letters, mostly written to her confessors and superiors over a period of 66 years, supplemented with items of a journaling type. Teresa had expressed the desire that these materials be destroyed, lest they shift interest and attention from Jesus to herself, but the church authorities overruled her wish. And what the letters revealed was that, after two decades of constant joyful intimacy with Christ, from 1948 on—that is, for 49 years, during the whole time of her leadership of the Missionaries of Charity—felt abandonment was the essence of her experience. Behind all the cheerful, upbeat, encouraging, Christ-honoring utterances that flowed from her during these years in a steady stream, lay the permanently painful sense that, quite simply, God had gone, leaving her in aching loneliness, apparently for all eternity. “They say people in hell suffer eternal pain because of the loss of God. In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not really existing (Jesus, please forgive my blasphemies—I have been told to write everything)...not a single thought of heaven enters my mind—for there is no hope” (Kolodiejchuk, pp. 192 f.). “I am told God loves me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul” (p. 187). “The place of God in my soul is blank….The torture and pain I can’t explain” (p. 210). “If I ever become a saint, I will surely be one of ‘darkness’….I will continually be absent from heaven—to light the light of those in darkness on Earth” (p. 230). These are typical expressions, from Teresa’s own hand, of the spiritual experience she lived in. After making full allowance for her Slavic, sometimes over-the-top forthrightness, it remains clear that her torment went very deep.

Teresa’s counselors eventually convinced her that God had chosen and indeed privileged her to enter at a deep level into the suffering of Jesus on the cross, the distress to which he testified when he shouted, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk. 15:34). Joseph Neuner, a theologian, told her that, though she could do nothing to change this, nor perhaps should she want to, her very craving for an awareness of God’s presence showed that he was continuing with her as a fact, and that living in darkness was part of her God-appointed destiny with Jesus. These thoughts led her, by her own admission, to find joy, not indeed in her sense of God’s absence as such, but in her knowledge that she lived in spiritual desolation by the will of God. Hence she came to settle submissively for the lifelong permanence of her condition, should God will it so (as in fact, so it appears, he did).

This disclosure of Teresa’s inner life has startled Christians everywhere, and not only because it stands in such contrast to her public self-presentation, bustling, poised and cheerful, and her public utterances, in which the joy of loving, serving and being faithful to the Lord Jesus was a constant theme. It is also, and indeed primarily, because at all times and in all traditions Christians have believed that...
personal holiness of life (Teresa’s, for example) and heart-enjoyment of good and sustaining fellowship with God, anticipating heaven, do in fact go together. Why has this been believed? Because the whole Bible seems to promise it, the New Testament seems to model it, and the doctrine of God’s love to all penitent sinners who now seek to love him seems to guarantee it. The thought that long-term inner bleakness might belong to the vocation of a special servant of Christ seems initially incredible.

So what can be said to people who are devoting their life to serving God when spiritual darkness, the sense of divine abandonment, falls on their soul, as it fell on Teresa’s soul after two decades of intimacy with a gracious and, if we may so speak, forthcoming Lord? “Jesus gave himself to me,” she wrote, looking back on those years. But then for half a century, apart from a five-week break in 1958, it was a different story. At the start of this chapter I indicated my belief that, to some extent at least, Teresa’s experience is matched in the lives of others beside herself, in conservative Evangelicals and conservative Eastern Orthodoxy as well as in conservative Roman Catholicism. Outside the confidential exchanges between hurting and bewildered Christians and their pastors and spiritual directors, however, the matter is rarely discussed, so that at surface level it does not look as if this is a major problem, but the reality, I think, is different. Let us then see what is available in our respective traditions to help us face up to this perplexity as the recurring human heartache that I believe it to be.

Darkness: The Church’s Resources

Following the New Testament writers, the whole Christian church has always thought and taught that God’s planned destiny for his own redeemed people is a personal transformation, both intrinsic and relational, that can be described in several ways. In terms of the world as it is, and ourselves as we are, it is salvation, deliverance, and rescue from sin and from all the evil that is both around us and within us. In terms of our spoiled human nature and consequent exposure to death in all its dimensions, physical and spiritual, it is total healing, sinless perfection, radical reintegration, and full moral integrity expressing the maximum of love for God, for others, and for all God’s good creation as such. In terms of God’s own holiness, it is, first, the ending through Christ’s cross of God’s retributive wrath against us, and second, our re-creation and reconstruction in the divine image, from the inside out, with what Scripture calls the heart—that is, the motivational and dynamic core of our being—as its starting-point and continuing center. Finally, in terms of the purpose for which God gave us our existence in the first place, it is communion and fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, starting now and never ending.

In Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the journey Christians are on as they move towards their heavenly destination is typically thought of as climbing a mountain; Evangelicalism typically

“The fullest grace can be received by those only who continue to obey during the dryness in which all grace seems to be withheld.”

C.S. Lewis
pictures it rather as a pilgrimage across undulating country, yet essentially on the flat; but that it is a journey which every day presents fresh challenges is something on which all agree.

In spelling out this many-sided biblical truth about human destiny, both Roman Catholics and Evangelicals reveal themselves as having been conditioned by the churchwide renewal of personal piety that began in the sixteenth century as a spinoff from the Renaissance, and that led in due course to the sentimental religious romanticism of the nineteenth century. This, with its pervasive stress on sweet feeling and suffering, was itself a spinoff from the secular romanticism of that era in the West. (Eastern Orthodoxy, less affected by cultural developments in Western Europe and North America, works still with an older, more bracing conceptuality derived from the Greek patristic Fathers.)

The Roman Catholic account of how fellowship with God is advanced, which must have been part of Teresa’s spiritual nurture among the Loreto Sisters, is pronouncedly anthropocentric—that is, it focuses directly on the experience of the recipient of God’s grace, which is here thought of as a beneficent energizing force, mediated mainly through the sacraments. Shaping the account is the still hugely influential mapping of the movement forward by the silver-tongued Spaniard Juan de Yepes (1542-91), colleague of Teresa of Avila in reforming and renewing the Carmelite order. He is better known today as John of the Cross. John presents spiritual advance as an upward, Godward progress in three stages, which in exposition form a sequence but in individual lives regularly overlap and intertwine, partly by reason of our own inner complexity and lack of full self-knowledge and integration, and partly because of backward slippage while making the ascent. In each stage activity and passivity are combined. In brief, John’s typology of the ascent is as follows.

The first stage is purgation or catharsis, whereby a spiritual beginner is weaned from attachment to anything and everything apart from God himself. Sense-oriented, sensation-focused appetites are negated and mortified; what Richard Baxter the Puritan called “carnal self” is dethroned and denied; bad habits are broken, and complete consecration is worked for. The active aspect of this stage is the effort to enter into full repentance and self-mastery, the passive aspect is that only by God’s grace, for which the beginners pray and on which they depend, are these goals achieved. As this radical reordering of life is pursued, new feelings of helplessness and despair and killing loss arise, and so does a sense of being, after all, newly distant from God, who is not, it seems, answering prayers for more real and robust repentance and quicker escape from worldliness of heart. Apparently, God has in measure withdrawn, leaving us bereft of both what are called the comforts of religion and of most other comforts too. (In fact, he is weaning us away at a deep level from self-focused habits of mind and heart, though this is not appreciated till afterwards.) John calls this paradoxical condition the dark night of the senses.
But the purgative process is not in any case permanent; it leads in due course to the second stage, illumination, on which, now that the binding tyranny of sin has been decisively overcome, spiritual understanding, nourished by Scripture and the church’s inherited formulations of revealed truth, greatly depends. Light, insight and wisdom are prayed for and graciously given, ordinarily through hard thinking, studying and meditation. Discursive doxological reflection on God, and enriching analytical contemplation of him, characterize this stage of the ascent, and all the understanding brings joy. God is teaching, and the heart is loving it.

In the unitive phase, however, to which illumination leads on, things are different. Conceptualized contemplations of God are largely left behind, and in their place, through God’s gracious enabling, Christians maintain an ongoing loving look Godward, basking as it were in the sunshine and warmth of God’s own love as grace sheds it abroad in their heart. This is realized union with God. It is heaven’s life in embryo. It is a state in which the true, deep, authentic reality of God and ourselves in relationship, which the words that revealed it to us—first, God’s words in Scripture, and then the church’s echoing of them in liturgical, confessional, and devotional response—also partly hid from us, comes to be truly and deeply grasped. It is a state of enhanced selfhood, in which clarity, desire, and contentment are ineffably and transcendently one. God’s grace establishes it as a steady state of expressed love, both ways, and hence of great peace, great joy, and animating adoration, for the living of the rest of one’s life on earth, and then the life beyond.

But the transition from illumination to union is unsettling. The theological verbalizations and spiritual speech through which one has come to define one’s knowledge of God and to commune with him come to seem hollow and empty. The light, meaning the sense of God’s presence with us and self-giving to us that the words had previously carried through our mind into our heart, dissolves into darkness, and once again one feels abandoned. The feelings of finality into which our theologizing had led us are no longer with us, and when we turn to prayer we find ourselves radically disoriented, unsure of what we thought we knew and floundering. Actively, the experience is one of seeking to hold tight to God while things sway and buckle under one, and God, one feels, slips through one’s fingers. Passively, God is detaching one from what had hitherto been fixed points in one’s inner life, for a purpose inconceivable in advance. John calls this the dark night of the spirit, or soul. Beyond it, when God brings us out into the sunshine of conscious union with himself, we find that what we had, or thought we had, before returns to us, reconceived, refocused, and reinforced; but inasmuch as the dark night itself was partial demolition to make way for a better building, bewildermoment and pain, inward suffering, frustration, and awareness of loss, are inescapable during the demolition project.

The roots of this doctrine are in third-century Christian Platonist Origen’s picturing of prayer as climbing up a mountain to God, and in the teaching of fifth-century neoplatonist Dionysius, the pseudo-Areopagite, who affirmed that darkness was the light in and by which God finally gives himself to us in love, and that purification and illumination are the steps to this union. John’s scheme is a classic welding together of these ideas, with his own understanding of the two nights, that of the senses and that of the soul, (continued on page 16)
added in. Variations on, and adaptations and extensions of, John’s account have appeared in Roman Catholicism over the centuries in abundance, but the theme on which these variations were based is as summarized above, and this remains the starting point of expectations among Roman Catholic teachers of the spiritual life.

The delineation of advancing fellowship with God that Evangelicals have historically offered, also with many variations of detail, differs from the Catholic conception in at least the following basic ways.

First, Evangelical formulations of fellowship with God are governed, as is Evangelical theology throughout, by the principle of the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Assertions and proposals that have no biblical backing do not have a place in these accounts.

Second, Evangelical formulations of fellowship with God are angled, as indeed is the Bible’s entire view of the Christian life, pneumato-centrically rather than anthropo-centrically—that is, not in a man-centered but in a Holy Spirit-centered way. As today’s scholarship increasingly recognizes, the theological work of the magisterial Reformers, the English Puritans, the continental scholastics and Pietists, the leaders of the eighteenth-century revivals and the international Evangelical leadership since, has been deeply Trinitarian, gospel-shaped, and focused in particular not only on the cross but also on what the Holy Spirit does in human lives. It is not too much to say that the serious exploration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in Christians, which began with Luther and Calvin, opened a new era in Christian understanding.

Third, Evangelical formulations of fellowship with God are founded on, and framed by, the confessional doctrine of justification though faith. This doctrine determines that knowledge of being always a sinner—one can stand before God only through God’s daily reaffirmation of one’s pardon and acceptance on the basis of Christ’s righteousness and vicarious sin-bearing—must always be front and center in all analyses of the life of grace.

Fourth, Evangelical formulations of fellowship with God build on an elaborate, explicit understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The Evangelical concept of regeneration covers three connected realities. The first is the Spirit’s work of causing us to hear and grasp in our hearts God’s gospel call for conscious, deliberate, active trust in the living Lord Jesus Christ as our sin-bearing Savior and divine Master. The second is the Spirit’s invisible but potent action in uniting us to the risen, reigning Christ, thereby renewing our hearts and drawing out of us the response that the gospel requires. The third is the Spirit’s coming to reside within us henceforth, imparting Jesus’ presence and vitality (“Christ lives in me,” Gal. 2:20), empowering us for godly living (“good works,” Eph. 2:10, etc.), changing our character by instilling Jesus-like habits (“the fruit of the Spirit,” Gal. 5:22-23), and making effective our efforts to terminate our personal sinful ways (“by the Spirit put to death [mortify] the misdeeds of the body,” Rom. 8:13). These three blessings together constitute our new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and new birth [or, birth from above] (Jn. 3:3-8) through the liberating Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). All that Evangelicals affirm about Christian holiness rests on, and grows out of, the twin doctrines of justification and regeneration, which declare our new status in relation to God and our new state in relation to ourselves, respectively.

It is not too much to say that the serious exploration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in Christians, which began with Luther and Calvin, opened a new era in Christian understanding.
How then do Evangelicals conceptualize the life of holiness, as compared with Catholic conceptualizations? Briefly:

(1) The comprehensive frame of thought is not climbing from lower to higher levels of attainment and closeness to God, but the biblical images of walking to a destination (i.e., living one's life purposefully; see Col. 2:6-7, etc.) and racing for a prize (i.e., exerting one's energy purposefully; see 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 12:1-3, etc.). Inasmuch as this involves breaking with not only one's previous behavior patterns but also with the whole tenor of the world's way of acting, the Christian life, which fundamentally is faith in action, may and must be viewed as a life of repentance, that is, of turning or returning to God from the way one was or might soon be going, and making all-round obedience to God the rule of one's life henceforth.

(2) The experience is of the Spirit engendering good desires, plans, and purposes in us, and enabling good fulfillment of them by us, as he changes us at a deep level, inducing profounder humility, heartier thanksgiving, purer God-centeredness and others-centeredness through Jesus-centeredness, livelier adoration of the triune God, more openhearted displays of initiative and outreach for the Lord's honor and praise, and more deeply anchored joy of assurance, as the Holy Spirit bears his inward witness to our hope of glory.

(3) Our consecration and obedience to God, which are the fundamentals of holy living, are to be lived out in the social contexts of marriage, family, local church, and local community, rather than in the heavily regulated apartness of religious orders. The long-standing Catholic distinction between “the religious” (clergy, monks, nuns) and the rest is not made. The historic monastic Rules (of Benedict and others) are currently much appreciated as resources for the ordering of Evangelical personal life in terms of attitude and self-discipline, but monastic community life as such is not.

(4) Today’s Evangelicalism has little to say about spiritual darkness, but in the older tradition it was very different. It was recognized that God’s sovereignty brings upon us from time to time

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time episodes of spiritual darkness, in which what is sensed is his absence and displeasure rather than his presence and the assurance of his love and of one’s own future happiness with him. Sometimes these moments are wake-up calls regarding overdue behavioral changes, and sometimes they are simple tests of fidelity, imposed as a kind of workout through which the saints emerge stronger than before. Detailed evidence as to what such desertion, or abandonment, feels like, why God inflicts it, and how to handle it, is found in the Psalms (see 38, 42, 88, 119:67, etc.), in the book of Job, and in Isaiah 50:10: “Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.” The comments of the Puritan Matthew Henry on this verse cover the ground, as Evangelicals understand it.

... it is a case which sometimes happens among the professors of religion, yet not very often... They walk in darkness, when their evidences for heaven are clouded, their joy in God is interrupted, the testimony of the Spirit is suspended, and the light of God’s countenance is eclipsed.

And what to do?

Let him stay himself upon his God, his in covenant; let him keep hold of his covenant-relation to God, and call God his God, as Christ on the cross, My God, My God. Let him stay himself upon the promises of the covenant and build his hopes on them.

In other words, as Toplady expressed it in the days of the Evangelical Revival:

Blest is the man, O God,
That stays himself on thee;
Who waits for thy salvation, Lord,
Shall thy salvation see.
When we in darkness walk,
Nor feel the heavenly flame,
Then is the time to trust our God,
And rest upon his name.
Soon shall our doubts and fears
Subside at his control;
His lovingkindness shall break through
The midnight of the soul.
His grace will to the end
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the life divine.

Whatever further message the darkness may have, it is always a call from God to keep hoping by indomitable faith in his covenant faithfulness.

Darkness: Some Closing Reflections

Ordinarily, when persons who in Christ are alive to God and pursuing holiness of life bring to God their praises and petitions, the sense that God is present, and hears, and cares is part of the experience. In the same way, awareness of the location (some sort of room, or out in the open air) and of one’s own posture (kneeling, standing, sitting, walking, or lying prostrate) are part of the experience. Awareness of these physical realities is diffused, in the sense of being peripheral to the encounter with God that one is focusing on, being only the psycho-physical frame for the focusing; nonetheless, it is integral to the experience, in the sense that without it shock and disruption will prevail. (Imagine how it would be if in the middle of your own praying you felt yourself floating in empty space.) Now, confidence in the friendly presence and attention of our God
when we pray is given us by the Holy Spirit who indwells us: it is in fact God starting to fulfill the prayer that he will shine the light of his face upon us (Num. 6:25; Ps. 4:6, 31:16, 119:135, etc.; 2 Cor. 4:4). But should the Spirit for any reason withhold this diffused sense of God being with us in love to us when we pray, we should feel totally disoriented and desolate, and our praying itself would seem empty and unreal. Does this ever happen? Yes. Some Christians never go through this experience, but some have to face it quite often. And Mother Teresa had to endure it for half a century, from the founding of the Missionaries of Charity to the end of her life.

Some specific comments may now help to put Teresa’s experience in proper perspective. Negatives first.

This was not an experience of doubt; for doubt debilitates, draining one’s confidence and energy by undermining one’s certainties. Teresa’s certainties were never in doubt. She was always sure of the historic Christian faith and of the grace that flows from Jesus, particularly as she believed through the Mass; she had no doubt about the administrative procedures of the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church; she had absolute confidence in the love of the Lord Jesus for herself and for everyone else, including the poorest of the Indian poor, whom Hindu society wrote off as valueless; she was totally convinced that she was called to take the love of Christ to them; and she was ever a human dynamo in furthering this project.

Nor was her experience one of depression, in any of its varied and complex modes; for depression, like doubt, drains the energy, and can hardly be kept hidden for any length of time. Teresa, however, was always genuinely cheerful in public, and spoke constantly of the joy of doing Jesus’ will. She practiced, and taught her nuns to practice, what she called “the big smile” in everything. Her often-repeated “Take whatever he gives, and give whatever he takes, with a big smile” (p. 225) became almost a motto and a mantra for her ministry.

Nor was she passing through the dark night of the soul as Catholic tradition conceives it; for that darkness, however similar while it lasts to Teresa’s, is temporary, leading on to experiential union with God, whereas Teresa by her own testimony had known experiential union with Christ in particular for twenty years before the pain of inner darkness became her permanent condition.

Nor, again, was she undergoing an experience of detection, God sending pain to alert her to issues of repentance and obedience that she had evaded. Quite apart from the fact that the inner darkness spanned her whole half-century of leadership, it is safe to say there were no problems of that kind in Teresa’s life.

Was it demonic? Partly, perhaps; for Job’s voicing of the desolation into which God had allowed Satan to plunge him (Job 23) matches in several ways Teresa’s written expressions, penned for her confessors and spiritual superiors, of her own inward barrenness as she felt it. But whereas God permitted Job to be desolated in order to show how his faith would express itself in faithfulness under pain and strain, it seems that Teresa’s suffering was ordained for a pastoral purpose.

Was her experience then disciplinary in a biblical sense, that is, planned by God to enhance the quality of her discipleship? Kolodiechuk seems right to urge that it was. There are two possibilities here, maybe overlapping (it is not for us to be dogmatic on this point). The divine discipline might be devotional, aimed at deepening the relationship between God’s servant and the triune Lord, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And it might be diaconal, aimed

...faith, once given, is indomitable, just as God’s covenant is unbreakable, and the knowledge that this is so is an effective means of keeping Christians trusting and hoping, even in the dark.

Was her experience then disciplinary in a biblical sense, that is, planned by God to enhance the quality of her discipleship? Kolodiechuk seems right to urge that it was. There are two possibilities here, maybe overlapping (it is not for us to be dogmatic on this point). The divine discipline might be devotional, aimed at deepening the relationship between God’s servant and the triune Lord, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And it might be diaconal, aimed
at qualifying the disciple more fully for particular works of ministry to others. The interpretation of Teresa’s experience as devotional discipline seems dubious. What Teresa underwent was certainly not the transitional dark night of the soul as John of the Cross described it, a condition paving the way to deeper union with God, whatever correspondences there may be between the quality of the two experiences as such. For her experience followed a deep-level, years-long enjoyment of union with, in particular, Jesus, the Lord whom she loved, and whose “little bride” she had seen herself in her youth as being, and once the dryness, desolation, and sense of divine withdrawal had come it was permanent. But the reality of this as diaconal discipline seems clear. “I really believe,” wrote a counselor, “that the reason Mother Teresa had to undergo so much darkness in her life is that it would bring about a greater identification with the poor.”2 Surely so.

So what biblical truth does all of this illustrate and enforce for us? First, that the life of holiness, loving and uncompromising consecration to God, will and must also be a life of unstinted loving service to one’s neighbors, including the least attractive among them.

Second, that what one does for others is the real test of the genuineness and depth of one’s love to God, and specifically to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Third, that Christian contentment, cheerfulness, and joy are fed, not directly by spiritual experiences—feelings, visions, raptures, thrills, which come and go, and in particular cases may hardly come at all—but by cognitive meditation and reflection—that is, by thinking, and thinking often—about the goodness, glory, and grace of the holy Three.

Fourth, that God uses the darkness experiences, not only outward in circumstances but inward in the soul, for instruction (“only God can satisfy”), correction (“lay aside every weight”), edification (“fear not…be strong…hope to the end”), and preparation for usefulness (“…who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God”).

Fifth, it is not God’s usual practice to tell us in advance the reason why testing experiences are planned to come our way, and we do not glorify God by agonizing over the “why?” question. Our calling, rather, is to respond to every state of affairs, and every form of experience, in as Christ-like a manner as we can.

In all these matters, we should thank God for Mother Teresa’s example, which points the way ahead for us all.

Notes

1. This idea of what has technically been termed reparative suffering is a Roman Catholic speculation. It stems from the idea that Christ draws saints, in the Catholic sense of specially holy persons, into a specially close identification with himself, particularly in relation to the agonies of his atoning death. The idea is used to explain stigmata (marks on hands and feet corresponding to the nail prints on Jesus’ crucified body) on the rare occasions when they occur. Any sign of this specially close identification with Christ’s crucifixion experience is seen as a badge of honor, given by the Savior himself.

2. The counselor is Father Michael van der Peet (Kolodiejchuk, p. 277). Teresa wrote to Father Neuner: “The physical situation of my poor left in the streets unwanted, unmoved, unclaimed—are (sic) the true picture of my own spiritual life, of my love for Jesus, and yet this terrible pain has never made me desire to have it different. What’s more, I want it to be like this for as long as He wants it” (p. 232). Writes Kolodiejchuk: “Her interior darkness gave Mother Teresa the capacity to comprehend the feelings of the poor” (p. 233).
Lessons on Grace in a Valley of Grief
(continued from page 3)

Will and I took the first flight to Michigan the next morning, but standing at the curb in Detroit, I almost expected my dad to pick us up, apologizing for all the confusion. It’s amazing how long it takes for reality to set in. Even after the funeral I could hardly grasp that my dad was truly gone. I wore the “invisible blanket” that C.S. Lewis talked about—no matter where I was or what I was doing, I felt isolated and separate. I felt there was an omnipresent fog around me, and something in me desperately wanted others to acknowledge it.

By God’s grace and in spite of the fog, I graduated from law school six months later. I have never shed as many tears as I did that day. That my daddy wasn’t there was enough, but my heartache was intensified by the fact that he had taken the highly unusual step of ordering my graduation gift the summer before. As I opened a rare and beautifully ornate copy of the United States Constitution, I thought I would die of grief. And it was in the weeks that followed, as I was studying for the bar exam, that I lived those first words of A Grief Observed, which so aptly state, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.” I started having panic attacks. I was afraid, although I didn’t know what I was afraid of. I was emotionally and physically exhausted and yet I could not sleep. It was the undeniable hand of God that helped me pass the bar, and what a gift it was to have six weeks to rest before I had to start my new job.

Of course my mom was devastated by my father’s sudden and unexpected death, but my fear of losing her in a sea of grief never materialized. Both of my brothers and my sister devoted lots of time to caring for her, and I bought a cell phone and talked to her during my commute every day. I was so proud of my mom because she clung to God’s promises and her faith never wavered. As a family we coped fairly well. Sorrow brought us closer and we talked more often about our faith and things eternal. Life seemed to be returning to normal.

But two years later, in January 2002, I got another phone call from Craig. This time he was calling about my mom’s brother, whom we all adored and lovingly called Uncle Butch. Uncle Butch had doted on all his nieces and nephews, teasing us unmercifully and loving us unconditionally. In his early fifties he had started to exhibit dramatic mood swings, and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Uncle Butch had visited Will and me in Washington in 2000 in the midst of a mild episode of mania. I remember him talking sixty miles an hour, and telling me all sorts of hilarious stories. It was a bit like being around someone very gregarious, but it was over the top. You just knew something wasn’t right. I remember answering the phone in the kitchen that evening when Craig told me that Uncle Butch had taken his own life. Again we traveled to Michigan for the funeral. But this funeral was different because even though mental illness is like any other illness in some respects, for those left behind after a suicide there is an element of grappling with feelings that their loved one chose to leave them.

“We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.”

C.S. Lewis
Lessons on Grace in a Valley of Grief
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In July that same year, my mom was visiting us, spending time bonding with our firstborn, when she got a call on her cell phone. I vividly remember hearing her cry out, and I remember running down the steps to see what was the matter. My sweet and wonderful brother, Craig, had been in a small airplane that went down that morning in the Atlantic Ocean. Although the Coast Guard had reported that there were no survivors, I tried to rationalize that Craig was a strong swimmer, that there might have been some mistake, that there had to be some mistake. I could not lose him too, and my mom couldn’t lose him either. This would be too much.

I think probably all big brothers play the role of protector for their little sisters, but Craig, being seven years older than me, took this position very seriously. When as a child I was scared of storms or nightmares I didn’t run to my parent’s room. I think they would have sleepily told me I was being silly, but Craig was a fount of sympathy and never ran out of patience. And that was the story of our entire relationship. I always could, and always did, run to him in the storms of life.

The next morning we flew to Florida, where Craig had lived. We had a memorial service there, and then a few days later we went on to Michigan for the funeral. I remember sitting in a row on the airplane with my mom, Will, and our baby boy, and watching tears stream down Will’s cheeks the entire flight. It was an odd comfort for me to have my husband grieve not just for me, but with me.

A couple of months later, in November 2002, my sister gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, named Brett. When Brett was just a couple of days old, the doctors told my sister and her husband that parts of Brett’s brain were missing and that he could not process what his eyes were capable of seeing. Brett is now six years old and does not walk or talk. His blindness and other disabilities have made achieving even the simplest of baby milestones a challenge, and caring for him is tremendously taxing.

In December of 2004 I got yet another tragic and unexpected phone call. This time it was from my cousin Cassie, who is more like my sister than my cousin. It was Cassie’s dad, Uncle Butch, who had committed suicide just a few years before. I remember Cassie’s shock-induced calm as she told me that her three-month-old baby girl had inexplicably died that day at daycare.

Two days later we were once again traveling to Michigan, seeing the same friends and family. In some respects it was like reliving a terrible nightmare, but the tiny little casket and precious, perfect baby lying inside made this funeral especially heart-wrenching. Although Cassie and her husband, Michael, both seemed resigned to God’s sovereignty despite their aching hearts, it was impossible not to wonder how could taking this little life, ripping this beautiful baby girl away from this loving family be part of God’s plan? How could He use something like this for good? These are hard questions, and I don’t have answers right now, maybe I never will. Will and I are blessed with three sons, and Cassie and Michael now have two daughters, but it often occurs to me, and probably to them, that they should have three.

Over the course of these difficult years, I’ve seen various biblical truths play out in my own life and in the lives of those around me. Specifically, these years have taught me that God never gives us more than we can handle. When I hear people say things like, “I couldn’t take it if such and such happened,” I cringe. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (NIV). I am learning to rest in confidence that whatever comes my way, He will be there to sustain me. It’s very freeing, not just to read this truth in Scripture, but to know it in the depths of my soul.
Another truth I’ve observed is that life is fleeting and the future unknowable. James reminds us that we cannot know what will happen tomorrow; he says, “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (4:14, NIV). This I know intimately, so intimately, in fact, that unexpected phone calls at odd hours startle me. But the benefit of my experience is that I treasure the gifts I have in the present. My losses have instilled a profound gratitude for the here and now.

I’ve also learned that true love for God is not based on what He can do for us, as some “Christian” bestsellers suggest. Rather, love for God should be a response to who He is and His love for us. And that brings me to the most vital of the lessons that I have learned. Simply put, it is all about believing God and His Word. Regardless of whether you are stuck in the valley or enjoying still waters, every day you face a choice of utmost importance. Are you going to believe God and His promises on this day, in this moment, or are you going to doubt Him? There are really only two options.

As I have sought to trust him in my sufferings, He has been correcting my expectations and centering me in the present so that I do not miss today’s gifts. I am finding that there’s something qualitatively different about lessons learned in times of trouble. While the still, small voice of our Heavenly Father is always there, somehow it is easier for me to discern in the valley of the shadow of death. Beside still waters there are often distractions for me, but in the hour of desperation, when there is nowhere to turn, I have found that God’s grace is indeed sufficient. These times of brokenness have instilled contentment, gratitude, and empathy.

Some may question whether we could learn God’s lessons another way, but I believe Job’s plea for understanding is instructive. God answered him with a series of questions that highlight how little we, in our humanness, truly understand, and then He said, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?” So even though I do not understand the series of tragedies that have happened in my family, I cannot contend with the Almighty, much less presume to correct Him. Rather, I trust that because God is a good, wise, and loving Father, these hardships were necessary for my ultimate good.

Through this experience, I desperately want to learn and apply all that God has for me, and I want to continue to reflect on these lessons and share with others God’s faithfulness and love, even in the worst of times. As I do, the words of Isaiah are a great encouragement: “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (40:31, NIV).

Notes

2. “The more we believe that God hurts only to heal, the less we can believe that there is any use in begging for tenderness. A cruel man might be bribed—might grow tired of his vile sport—might have a temporary fit of mercy, as alcoholics have fits of sobriety. But suppose that what you are up against is a surgeon whose intentions are wholly good. The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more inexorably he will go on cutting. If he yielded to your entreaties, if he stopped before the operation was complete, all the pain up to that point would have been useless. But is it credible that such extremities of torture should be necessary for us? Well, take your choice. The tortures occur. If they are unnecessary, then there is no God or a bad one. If there is a good God, then these tortures are necessary. For no even moderately good Being could possibly inflict or permit them if they weren’t.” (C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed, p. 43.)
Evangelical, But Not Evangelistic
(continued from page 5)

up for review, assessment, and evaluation. Many have been found “wanting,” or in today’s terms, “embarrassing,” and so have been jettisoned or simply put in storage with the quiet hope that they may be conveniently forgotten or just disappear.

Now I know some will object that evangelism is taking place and that many individuals and churches do share their faith, and this is no doubt true. What I am referring to is a broader trend that shows a growing disaffection with the word evangelism and a definite loss of passion in terms of actual practice. Let me illustrate. At Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, we often help Christians respond to difficult questions posed to them or their faith. The idea of apologetics (1 Peter 3:15) is to offer “a reason for the hope that we have.”

Many times in Q & A sessions, we encounter all kinds of abstract, theoretical, and hazy questions. The questioner posits some dilemma that they feel is an obstacle to faith, yet when they are pressed, I often find that the dilemma described is not a question emerging from real conversations with unbelievers, but is rather speculation exchanged by Christians with one another about their beliefs. As Michael Ramsden in our UK office has often pointed out, in the absence of any real and practical sharing of the faith, there is no need for, and no relevance of, apologetics. It is in the context of sharing our faith that the role and value of apologetics becomes clear.

When we study the lives of men like C.S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and Ravi Zacharias, we realize that they invested serious amounts of time and effort in clarifying their beliefs and articulating their message. So much of their work is rooted in certain beliefs and values: the belief that Christ is unique and is the only Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12); the belief in the lostness of men and women and the gospel as a message of salvation (Romans 10:14-15); the belief in evangelism and the great commission to actually go forth and share the good news (Matthew 28:18-20).

If we were to do a broad historical review of famous evangelicals, we would discover a litany of names and personalities committed to the task of evangelism. I think of John Bunyan and his famous Pilgrim’s Progress. I think of Jonathan Edwards and his passion for his New England compatriots. I think of Charles Spurgeon and his faithful preaching and witness in a rapidly changing London. In the twentieth century names like Billy Graham, John Stott, Bill Bright, George Verwer, and a host of others spring to mind.

In today’s postmodern, diverse, and challenging arena, we face several crises:
• An identity crisis: we want to distance ourselves from all that is offensive, irrelevant, and ugly from our evangelical past, so much so that many want to abandon the name “evangelical.”
• A crisis of calling: we are unsure why we are here, what we should do, and whether the gospel is just one more thing among many (perhaps an irrelevance).
• A crisis of passion: it is okay to be passionate about political positions, sports personalities, the cars we prefer, or the food we desire, but our faith?
• A crisis of vision: we are not primarily animated by God’s purpose for the salvation of the lost.

Now the issue is this: If indeed some information has come to light that overthrows the gospel, if perhaps Richard Dawkins’ book, The God Delusion, is indeed the definitive word against Christianity, or if the latest anti-Christian polemic has revealed some fatal blow to the historic faith, then we should admit defeat, get rid of our Christian paraphernalia, and close up shop. However, I do not think this is the case.

When I was a young Christian, I often heard people invoking (continued on page 26)
**Q: Was C.S. Lewis always a brilliant student?**

A: Lewis was certainly a brilliant thinker, but like many people, he had his areas of academic weakness. He excelled at English Literature. His tutor wrote of Lewis, “He has read more of the classics than any boy I ever had—or indeed I might add that any I ever heard of, unless it be an Addison or Landor or Macaulay. These are people we read of, but I have never met any... He is the most brilliant translator of Greek plays I have ever met.” However, in math Lewis had real difficulties. In fact, he never passed his math entrance exams for Oxford. He would have not been allowed to study there except for an exemption given to returning servicemen from World War I. So you can be brilliant in some areas, but not so brilliant in others. Perhaps that can give us comfort.

**Q: Is there too much violence in the Chronicles of Narnia for children to handle, as some have charged?**

A: Certainly there is some violence in the Narnia series—for instance, in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, we read about Peter’s fight, Aslan’s death, and the final battle. However, Lewis defended the place of violence in a children’s series. He argued that the world does contain violence, death, the need for courage, and a battle between good and evil. To shield children from such realities he thought could give them “a false impression and feed them on escapism in the bad sense.” They are likely to meet cruel enemies in life, so it is of value to have heard of brave knights. Lewis says, “Let there be wicked kings and beheadings, battles and dungeons, giants and dragons, and let villains be soundly killed at the end of the book. Nothing will persuade me that this causes the ordinary child any kind or degree of fear beyond what it wants, and needs, to feel. For, of course, it wants to be a little frightened.”
the phrase used in Revelation 2:1-7 regarding those who had “lost their first love.” As the years went by, I met some who could be described this way. They had only memories and nostalgia for the early days when faith was strong, vision was clear, and passion was real. However, in the passage the actual words say, “You have forsaken your first love” (Rev. 1:4, NIV). There is a vast difference between losing something (involuntary) and forsaking it (a deliberate act).

I wonder if the passage of time, the lack of attention to discipline and practice, and the steady erosion from other “loves” takes its toll in such a way that we find ourselves in a place that has little or no resemblance to the faith of our fathers and the biblical witness we are called to. My encounter with the Muslim gentleman was a reminder and a challenge.

- What is it I really value and am living for?
- Am I ready, willing, and able to share my faith as opportunity provides?
- Does passion for the gospel animate my soul?

As I look back, look around, and look ahead, I realize that nothing has changed in the message, but much has changed in the context and in me. My prayer to God is for a fresh stirring of the Holy Spirit to rekindle the passion and recalibrate my life and my commitments. I wish the same for you.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst…. My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day (Jn. 6:35, 40).

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).

I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die (Jn. 11:25-26).

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well (Jn. 14:6-7a).

Such statements may not sit well with a postmodern mindset that is squeamish about the whole idea of truth, and particularly any claims to truth. As C.S. Lewis once pointed out, many are willing to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but not his unique claims to be God. Lewis responded with these memorable words:

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God (Mere Christianity, p. 41).

Not only did Jesus himself believe that he was the only way to God, being one with God the Father, the early followers and apostles believed the same. Peter, in one of his early sermons said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The
Is Jesus Really the Only Way to God?  
(continued from page 26)

apostle Paul had hated Christians before he became one himself. After his conversion he spoke frequently about Christ with clear conviction that he was the only way to salvation. Speaking of Jesus he said, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10, 11).

In similar fashion the apostle John wrote, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God….God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 Jn. 5:1, 11-12).

Since the days of the apostles, the historic Christian Church affirmed the uniqueness of Christ in his identity and in his role as the only savior for human sin. There has, of course, been substantial variation with regard to particular doctrines among the various families and denominations of Christianity. But Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism have historically been in agreement that salvation is found in no other than the person of Christ. The recent trends are contrary to those convictions.

Conclusion

The growing number of Christians who are troubled by Jesus’ claims to be the single course of salvation indicates how much the world has come to live in us as we attempt to live in the world. We easily allow the push and pull of our culture to define our beliefs, commitments, and way of life, even while giving lip service to the name of Jesus. Perhaps the Pew Forum poll will be a wake-up call as to how much Christians have allowed the world to shape their sentiments.

Affirming the uniqueness of Christ for salvation and eternal life does not, of course, answer all our questions. There is much that God has not told us about the mysteries of life, death, and eternity. We naturally wonder what happens to those who never have an opportunity to embrace Christ. To such quandaries we must simply trust in a Savior who is both loving and just, and whose understandings are far beyond ours. We must acknowledge that from Scripture we know relatively little about heaven and hell. What we do know is that Jesus, the apostles, and the historic Church in all its variations have affirmed that Jesus is the only true way to God. And it only makes sense that if a person didn’t want Jesus as Savior and Lord on this earth, they would hardly want to spend eternity with Him.

To affirm the uniqueness of Christ for salvation is not cause for arrogance and boasting. In fact scripturally it is exactly the opposite. Our salvation has nothing to do with our attainments, efforts, and native beliefs. In salvation we do not find God through our own ingenuity. Rather, God finds us as we respond to his loving mercy in Christ as evidenced on the cross. The embrace of Christ as savior and Lord can never be touted as cause for human triumph, smugness, or self-assertion. It is not a sign of our superiority, or cause for triumphalistic efforts in society.

The uniqueness of Christ is a sign that the triune God of the universe cares so deeply for his wayward creatures that he mercifully provided a path to forgiveness, a way to the Father’s embrace. It is in the Father’s embrace through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that we come to realize that we can never pull the Triune God apart. For indeed to know Christ is to know the Father, and to know the Father is to know the Spirit, who enables us to stay true to the One Savior in the midst of a pluralistic world.

The growing number of Christians who are troubled by Jesus’ claims to be the single course of salvation indicates how much the world has come to live in us as we attempt to live in the world.
big-tent (literally) conference that will feed the soul on a range of topics from the emerging church to parenting teenagers. From the opening sessions on Saturday to the final evening event the following Friday, 52 lectures are offered, and those you cannot attend are available on CD.

To get a taste of the week’s offerings from last year, go to www.thefeedtrust.org and click on the talk entitled “In the Beginning God,” by John Lennox. You can view Dr. Lennox giving the opening evening celebration lecture and get a sense of his in-depth teaching.

The New Horizon conference for 2009 will be held from Saturday, July 18, through Friday July 24. The theme will be “Enjoying God,” with D.A. Carson speaking on Philippians and Ray Ortlund speaking on the Psalms. In addition, a wide variety of other speakers and seminars will help equip you to serve the Lord. As in 2008, Keith and Kristyn Getty will lead the worship. The Gettys’ sense of presence, thoughtfulness to what worship is, arrangements of the songs, both contemporary and traditional, and love of the Lord all come together to lead others in common worship that will be remembered for a lifetime. If you have ever sung “In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend, you have an idea of the blessing that awaits you. For more information on New Horizon 2009, visit www.newhorizon.org.uk.

Both New Horizon and the RZIM Summer Schools are rich sources of learning, inspiration, and encouragement that will deeply impact your life and equip you significantly. No matter which conference you choose, you will gain much to enable you to give back to the Lord in faithful and fruitful service. For travel plans from the United States to the RZIM Summer School, visit www.rzim.org. For travel plans for the New Horizon Conference from the United States, email newhorizon2009@cslewisinstitute.org.

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Urban Plunge
(continued from page 11)

and wondered if I could buy you some breakfast.” “Why?” he said. My stomach lurched. This was always the hardest part. “Well,” I said, “I’ve just spent the weekend in D.C. talking to people in the parks. They were on my mind, and when I saw you, I thought you might be hungry. I’d love to hear your story if you have a few minutes.”

“Well, okay then,” he said. We had not yet exchanged names, but we walked together to the convenience store next door. I chose a yogurt and stood waiting while he made his selections. He seemed timid at first, filling a cup with hot chocolate. I encouraged him to pick whatever he wanted and suggested a warm egg sandwich. After a few minutes (food selection cannot be rushed, as my 13 year-old reminds me), he chose a sandwich. We went together to the cash register, where the cashier looked a bit perplexed. “These three things, please,” I said.

My companion walked out while I paid, and I found him sitting on the sidewalk just outside the door. “Do you mind if I eat with you?” I asked. “Nope,” he said. “Do you mind sitting here?” He pointed to a spot on the concrete. “I’d be happy to,” I said. As I joined him on the sidewalk, I introduced myself and asked what had brought him here that morning. He then shared his name and said that he was on his way to see his parents, who were elderly and living
in Winchester. He had come from D.C. and was walking.

Jerry was very reflective and open. The conversation flowed easily now. He told me how he used to wait tables until alcoholism and a broken heart had joined forces. He actually wasn’t sure how he had ended up where he was now. He still had hopes and dreams but didn’t know how to make them happen. It was hard to pick yourself up, and he didn’t want to expect others to do it for him.

Sometimes I listened quietly, eating my yogurt as he talked. Sometimes I shared a thought or a verse that came to mind. I asked about his church background and about the higher power that he said had helped him to be sober for some time now. What was the difference between this higher power and God? Perhaps hope wasn’t something that we could generate on our own, but it was a gift. Sometimes I needed other people to remind me of that gift, if I couldn’t find it on my own. I shared the hope of the gospel with Jerry and encouraged him to seek God, who promises to be found by us when we cry out to Him. I prayed for Jerry, for safe travels, for his time with his parents, and for hope. After about 20 minutes, I told him that I had to go. It was time to meet my husband. I was at this coffee shop regularly and hoped that I would see him if he passed that way again.

I have prayed regularly for Jerry ever since, although I have not seen him since that first encounter. What blessings come with obedience! My heart is full of gratitude and sadness alike—full of what Jesus has done on the cross and His great love for both me and Jerry and sadness for the brokenness. I also pray for the people who observed the unusual interaction on the sidewalk that morning, including the cashier at the convenience store who came outside to say, “You are doing good.” I replied that I was just enjoying a few minutes with a new friend. “It’s getting cold out here,” the cashier said, in halting English. “We need to take care of him.” The cashier spoke of Jerry as if he wasn’t there, but the expression on his face told me that he would not soon forget the exchange.

The Urban Plunge was an eye-opening day, but we must choose to keep our eyes open. The poor in spirit and circumstance are always around us. My middle-class, suburban life is not as separate from them as I once thought. The Lord has stepped in and opened my eyes. He tells us in Scripture that we become responsible for what we know. Doing must follow knowing. Sometimes, we witness the added blessing of seeing the impact of our “doing” on those who are watching us. Perhaps through us, their eyes will be opened.

Since that day, I continue to ask the Lord to remind me of His great love for people, no matter where they live or what their circumstances. I pray that as you read this article, you will ask Him who or what He wants you to see today. Who are the “least of these” in your life? May the Father give us His heart for them and use us to do His work in their lives.
thoughts to ponder
(continued from page 31)

perfect contempt of the world, a fervent desire to excel in virtue, the love of discipline, the painfulness of repentance, the readiness to obey, the denial of ourselves, and the bearing of any affliction for the love of Christ, patiently, will give us great confidence we shall die happily. While thou art in good health thou mayest do much good; but when thou art sick, I see not what thou art able to do. Few by sickness grow better and more reformed; as also they who wander much abroad, seldom thereby become holy.

Trust not to friends and kindred, neither do thou put off the care of thy soul’s welfare till hereafter; for men will sooner forget thee than thou art aware of. It is better to look to it betime, and do some good before hand, than to trust other men’s help. If thou art not careful for thyself now, who will be careful for thee hereafter? The time that is now present is very precious; now are the days of salvation; now is the acceptable time. But alas! That thou shouldest spend thy time so idly here, when thou mightest seek to live eternally hereafter.

The time will come, when thou shalt desire one day or hour to amend in, and I can not say that it will be granted thee.

O beloved, from how great danger mightest thou deliver thyself, from how great fear free thyself, if thou wouldst be ever fearful and mindful of death! Labor now to live so, that at the hour of death thou mayest rather rejoice than fear. Learn now to die to the world, that thou mayest begin to live with Christ. Learn now to despise all earthly things, that thou mayest freely live with Christ. Chastise thy body now by repentance, that thou mayest then have assured confidence.

Ah, foolish me, why dost thou think to live long, when thou canst not promise to thyself one day? How many have been deceived and suddenly snatched away! How often dost thou hear these reports: Such a man is slain, another man is drowned, a third breaks his neck with a fall from some high place, this man died eating, and that man playing! One perished by fire, another by the sword, another of the plague, another was slain by thieves. Thus death is the end of all, and man’s life suddenly passeth away like a shadow.

Who shall remember thee when thou art dead? And who shall pray for thee? Do, do now, my beloved, whatsoever thou art able to do; for thou knowest not when thou shalt die, nor yet what shall befall thee after thy death. Now whilst thou hast time, heap unto thyself everlasting riches.

Who shall remember thee when thou art dead? And who shall pray for thee? Do, do now, my beloved, whatsoever thou art able to do; for thou knowest not when thou shalt die, nor yet what shall befall thee after thy death. Now whilst thou hast time, heap unto thyself everlasting riches. Think on nothing but the salvation of thy soul, care for nothing but the things of God…. Keep thyself as a stranger and pilgrim upon the earth and as one to whom the affairs of this world do not appertain. Keep thy heart free, and lifted up to God, because thou hast here no abiding city. Send heavenward thy daily prayers and sighs together with thy tears, that after death thy spirit may be found worthy with much happiness to pass to the Lord. Amen.
THOUGHTS TO PONDER

The Imitation of Christ
Chapter 23: Of Meditation on Death
by Thomas à Kempis


Very quickly there will be an end of thee here; look what will become of thee in another world. Today the man is here; tomorrow he hath disappeared. And when he is out of sight, quickly also is he out of mind. Oh, the stupidity and hardness of man’s heart, which thinketh only upon the present, and doth not rather care for what is to come! Thou oughtest so to order thyself in all thy thoughts and actions, as if today thou wert about to die. If thou hadst a good conscience, thou wouldest not greatly fear death. It is better to avoid sins than to flee death. If today thou art not prepared, how wilt thou be so tomorrow? Tomorrow is uncertain, and how knowest thou that thou shalt live till tomorrow?

What availeth it to live long, when there is so small amendment in our practice! Alas! Length of days doth more often make our sins the greater, than our lives the better! Oh, that we had spent but one day in this world thoroughly well! Many there are who count how long it is since their conversion; and yet full slender oftentimes is the fruit of the amendment in their lives. If to die be accounted dreadful, to live long may perhaps prove more dangerous. Happy is he that always hath the hour of his death before his eyes, and daily prepareth himself to die. If at any time thou hast seen another man die, make account thou must also pass the same way.

When it is morning, think thou mayest die before night; and when evening comes, dare not to promise thyself the next morning. Be thou therefore always in a readiness, and so lead thy life that death may never take thee unprepared. Many die suddenly and when they look not for it; for the Son of Man will come at an hour when we think not. When that last hour shall come, thou wilt begin to have a far different opinion of thy whole life that is past, and be exceeding sorry thou hast been so careless and remiss.

Oh, how wise and happy is he that now laboreth to be such a one in his life, as he wisheth to be found at the hour of his death! A (continued on page 30)
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